Venia of Heartwood

! Attention !

This Hero Book contains many secrets that should not be revealed until it is time.

Do not read any of the entries within unless you have been instructed to do so!

When you do read an entry, you may either read the contents aloud to the other players or keep them to yourself.

See "Reading Your Hero Book" on p. 26 of the Rules Reference for instructions on how to use this book.

Venia's vision

"I sense a powerful aox presence following you along. You must not let it control you."

The voice of aiun is interrupted by your Grandmother, whose skull you carry with you wherever you go.

"Do not be tempted by these foreign gods," says Grandmother. "We quothians have always listened to our ancestors, and this wisdom is good for you, as well."

"Yes, Grandmother," you reply.

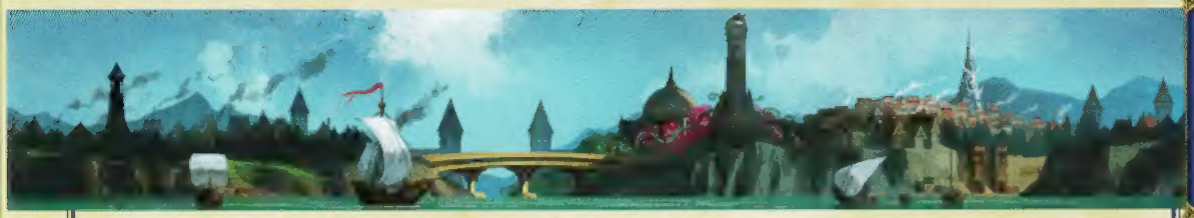
You feel the aiun speak more empathically now. "Do not listen to the demon living inside the skull. You must fight its influence, as should all quothians. Go to the Temple of the Fifth Eye in Runedale, and seek absolution."

"Yes, go there," speaks Grandmother, "but do not go as a humble servant. Go proudly to save Heartwood."

"Yes, Grandmother."

"But above all," interjects aiun, "you must now become a Keeper of the Breach."

Gain Item card 125 "Urskull ★☆☆".



Level 1 · Grandmother's Advice

The moons are shining as you perch on a tree in Victory Park, holding the urskull in your hands. It belonged to the mother of your mothers' mothers, but you just call her Grandmother. She speaks to you silently, but you hear the words.

"It is a difficult mission you have undertaken, grandchild, but I will help you. To save Heartwood, we must enter the Vortex. But before we can do that, we must be stronger."

"Yes, Grandmother."

She tells you of four kinds of magic and how a power opposite to hers can be found in the Temple of the Fifth Eye. That is what you need to grow strong.

You stand before the temple of the Cult of the Fifth Eye in Runedale. An unpleasant force emanates from the building, a magic unlike any you have experienced in Heartwood.

"I don't want to go in," you tell the urskull.

"I know, child. It is an unpleasant place. But you must go there and you must go without me. The eldritch powers of the cult would be too much for me."

You draw a deep breath. "Yes, Grandmother."

The next day, you leave the urskull in a safe place and approach the temple. Everything about it tells you not to go in, but you promised Grandmother.

You harden yourself and walk towards the door. As you reach for the handle, the door opens and someone walks out, carrying a huge pile of scrolls. They run into you and the scrolls fall to the ground.

"Oh, I am terribly sorry," he says. You see a white man in yellow robes and wearing a hat with eyes, clearly a priest of this religion. But he is quothian! You have never seen a white quothian before, but what is more, you have never seen

a quothian man outside of their pens in Heartwood. Yet here he is, on his knees, collecting scrolls. What a strange place this is, indeed!

You help him with the scrolls.

"Thank you. May the ancients protect you," he says as you gather all the scrolls. "Are you coming to Temple?"

"Oh, sorry about that," you say, ignoring his question. How do you speak to a free male quothian? "Um. Are you from Heartwood?"

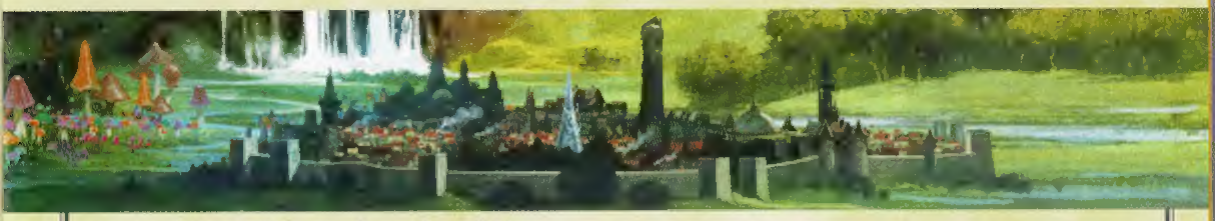
"My people were, obviously," he says. "I'm a third generation Benemite. My name is Rikko. Would you like me to show you the temple some time?"

Choose one:
A: *Accept the invitation.* » 23
B: *Silence the insolent male.* » 11
C: *Help him carry the scrolls instead.* » 19

City Activities · Level 1

» **Once per City step** » *Perform an urskull ritual.* » 16

» **Once only** » *Investigate the Cult of the Fifth Eye.* » 04



Level 2 · The Priest's Gift

You enter the Temple of the Fifth Eye where the white quothian male, Rikko, promised to show you around. Your true objective is to obtain a magical salve for Grandmother. Not spending time with Rikko. Not at all.

There are priests there dressed in yellow robes and tall hats and worshipers wearing their everyday clothes. They are from all peoples: nihteegri, korallians, pattangans, and even a blind boryot. Everyone has bare feet and their head covered, so you do the same.

You look around inside. There is a big hall with statues, incense, chandeliers, carpets and tapestries, but you are looking for a salve called the Essence of Life. Grandmother had no idea where it would be or what it looks like.

The beautiful male, Rikko, shows you the temple and tells you about his religion. You learn the Cult of the Fifth Eye venerates the old devices such as the monorail and believe they were left on Agemonia by a group of gods called the ancients. Now the ancients are returning and will favor those that are loyal to them. Indeed, where the statues of gods might normally be, there are instead white machines, most of them in disrepair.

The forbidding feeling from the temple stays with you, but being with Rikko gives you another strange sensation, something that reminds you of home, but also something else. Clearly you like him and he seems to like you, too.

He then takes you to a small room with long tables, laden with trinkets, salves, food and religious objects. The bad feeling is amplified, to the point of almost making you nauseous.

"What is this place?"

"This is where we keep those of our relics that have to do with aiun."

They never spoke of aiun in Heartwood, but you remember Shantor Three-Birds and the stone heads talking about it. You ask Rikko to tell you more.

"It is goodness and life. The force inside all of us when we fight the temptations of the aox demons."

"All quothians fight the aox demons, but I've never heard of this."

"Here, I want you to have some of this," he says and hands over a small jar full of sparkling salve. "We call it Essence of Life. It is goodness given form, a healing ointment and a source of miracles."

This is why Grandmother sent you here, but you are scared of touching it.

Choose one:

A: *Force yourself to take it, even if it burns.* » 22

B: *Let the power of the salve heal your doubts.* » 05

C: Spend 2 Stars » *Ask Rikko to send it to your lodgings via a courier.* » 14

City Activities · Level 2

» **Once per City step** » *Perform an urskull ritual.* » 16

» **Once per City step** » *Ask Grandmother to show you the future.* » 10

» **Once per City step** » *Try to steal a Fifth Eye scroll.* » 18

Level 3 · Conversations With Grandmother

You sit cross legged on the floor, preparing Rikko's salve following Grandmother's instructions. Grandmother's skull sits next to you, watching.

"The priest who gave you that disgusting cream," Grandmother speaks in your mind.

"Yes, Rikko. What about him?"

"You went to see him again."

"Yes, Grandmother."

"Why?"

You would rather not answer. It feels too personal, although you do not really know why.

You spread the Essence of Life on the floor and sprinkle blood on it, mixing it in. You speak the magic words and invoke the spirits of the dead.

5 +2

SUCCESS » 06 | FAIL » 17

City Activities · Level 3

» **Once per City step** » *Ask Grandmother to show you the future.* » **10**

» **Once only** » *Investigate the urskull.* » **03**

» **Once only** » **"Knowledge About the Urskull" in your Hero Journal** » *Secretly meet with Rikko.* » **12**

Level 4 · Love And Celibacy

You have been seeing Rikko for a while now. You are not used to talking with a quothian man. At home in Heartwood they are considered simple creatures necessary for procreation, but not for conversation. You two have talked for hours and hours.

But that is all you have done. He has not even held your hand, let alone done something more. You realize you need to take control.

One evening you are walking together with Rikko in Victory Park, admiring the colorful butterflies and lizards. You embrace him and try to peck him on the cheek. For a moment he enjoys it and briefly responds to your touch. Then he gains control of himself and withdraws. He looks torn.

"Venia. I want to touch you too," he says, "but it would be a great sin. I am a priest of the Fifth Eye."

"I know," you reply, "but I just can't stop thinking about you. Rikko, I love you."

"There is another kind of love," he says. "The love we feel for the ancients."

"Yeah, well, that's not the kind of love I'm looking for. I know you want me."

"Nevertheless, I have made a vow of celibacy. I cannot touch you. You have to accept that."

Choose one:

A: *Respect his vow and settle for spiritual communion.* » 01

B: *Convince him that your love cannot be wrong.* » 13

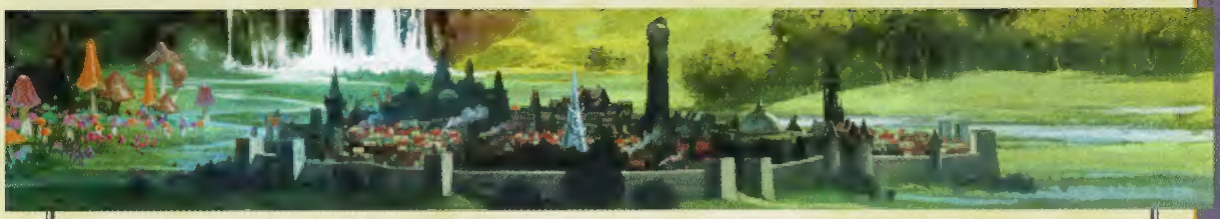
C: *Make him forget about his foolish vows.* » 24

City Activities · Level 4

» **Once per City step** » *Ask Grandmother to show you the future.* » 10

» **Once per City step** » *Try to steal a Fifth Eye scroll.* » 18

» **Once only** » ^ **with the Jade Tendril** » *Attend a Jade Tendril ceremony.* » 08



Level 5 · The Ceremony At The Crossroads

You are at a crossroads outside Runedale. You have crucified the korallian slaves you acquired from a workhouse and painted an aox symbol with their blood. You have lit the black candles and you have called upon the power of the moons.

You have placed the urskull in the middle of the crossroads and spread the desecrated Essence of Life on it. Now you repeat the words Grandmother speaks inside your head.

"With the power of Death I strengthen thee. With the power of the Night I strengthen thee. With the power of Aox I strengthen thee."

You see the urskull gently vibrate, then levitate in the air, level with your head. Grandmother's empty eye sockets glow red. The glow is so bright you can no longer see the two moons.

"Good, good!" Grandmother says. You are happy for her. Your quest is progressing exactly according to plan.

"No! Venia! What are you doing?" You turn around and see Rikko running towards you, yellow robes flowing in the dark. "Those were innocent korallians! I thought you had put all this behind you! Can't you see the skull is an evil spirit?"

"Lies," caws Grandmother inside your mind. "He is a lying cultist who wants to destroy us."

"Venia, you have to stop this madness! It is not too late to save you!"

Rikko is standing outside the magic circle, unwilling or unable to step inside it. Now Grandmother gives you a direct order.

"Kill him."

Choose one:
A: *Kill Rikko.* » 15
B: *Refuse to kill Rikko.* » 02
C: *Do nothing.* » 21

City Activities · Level 5

» **Once per City step** » *Ask Grandmother to show you the future.* » 10

» **Once per City step** » *Try to steal a Fifth Eye scroll.* » 18

» **Once only** » *Have a conversation with Grandmother.* » 09

Story Entries

01 Spiritual Communion

Spiritual communion is not exactly what you had in mind, but at this point you will settle for anything.

"Come to temple with me," he says. "Let me show you."

He leads you back to the Temple of the Fifth Eye. It is empty except for a few priests. He takes you to a back room dominated by a pedestal holding a white cube which hums gently. A device of the ancients no doubt, and for the cult, a holy relic.

You kneel in front of the sphere, facing each other. He raises his left hand, not quite touching you, but somehow you feel its presence even with your eyes closed. You do the same.

After a while it is as if you are taken out of this place and time, out of your body, and maybe even out of your mind. Your spirit is free and boundless as it intertwines with Rikko's in a feeling too profound to explain. Like sex, but with your minds, and in contact with the Fifth Eye.

Afterwards, you feel fulfilled. Not physically, but something more and better. You thank Rikko and you agree to do this again, soon.

Your party may gain +1 Reputation with the Cult of the Fifth Eye.

Gain .

02 No, Grandmother

"Kill him," Grandmother shrieks in your mind.

"No, Grandmother."

"What did you say?"

"I said no, Grandmother." You feel calmer than you thought you would be, powerful, even.

"Come toward the light. You can still be saved," Rikko says.

"No, my love. Your religion is not for me. But I can save you."

Rikko looks at you, not understanding. He is so innocent and beautiful.

"Leave this place," you say, "Run away and never come back. Otherwise you may die and I don't want your blood on my hands."

"I don't understand."

"You don't have to. If you love me, leave now."

He hesitates at first, then takes a few cautious steps back. His gaze wavers from you back to the ceremony and that is when the full terror of what he has witnessed strikes in. He runs away. There is a lump in your throat as you realize you may never see him again.

And now you must face Grandmother.

"You defied me, child."

"Yes, Grandmother."

"Have you embraced the Cult of the Fifth Eye and turned your back on me and on Heartwood?"

"No, Grandmother."

"Do you still want to finish our mission?" She is less angry than you thought she would be.

"Yes, Grandmother."

Gain an Inspiration gem.
Write "Venia Lightbound" in your Hero Journal.

03 The Secrets of the Urskull

You have carried the urskull for a long time, knowing it carries the spirit of one of your ancestors, but does it? Rikko, aiun, and many others claim she is an evil spirit.

They are lying, or are they?

There are many witches, warlocks, sorcerers, priests, and magi in Runedale, and you visit them all. From Warlocks of the Council of Eight to pattangan shamans, they all confirm the same thing: the urskull is infused with the power of aox and a demon lives inside it.

Grandmother is a demon.

Now you know.

Perhaps you have always known.

But does it matter if she can help you save Heartwood?

Write "Knowledge About the Urskull" in your Hero Journal.

04 Investigations Into the Fifth Eye

You ask about the Cult of the Fifth Eye at taverns and bazaars. It is a fairly new religion, only a few decades old. They worship the devices of the ancients, which they believe to be somehow connected to aiun, the power opposing aox and the demons of the Breach.

The Temple of the Fifth Eye used to be a pagan temple before the Benemites abandoned their superstitious ways and embraced science. The cosmographers replaced the priests and for a long time all of Benem was without religion.

But since the devices of the ancients started powering up all over Agemonia some years ago, there has been a surge of interest in this new religion.

But what is the Fifth Eye? Nobody seems to know...

Write "Knowledge About the Fifth Eye" in your Hero Journal.

05 Accept the Aiun

You close your eyes and feel the pleasant vibrations of aiun all around you, in the salve and in the temple, and even in Rikko. There is a force inside you that wants to fight it, but you surrender to aiun.

If you do not have "Knowledge About the Fifth Eye" in your Hero Journal, gain an Injury card.

Gain .

06 Urskull Empowered

The spirits of the dead flow from the magic circle with great power and you direct them to the urskull. It vibrates with magical force and is raised above ground, absorbing the power of the dead. Or the power of aox. Maybe it is all the same.

"Yes, my child!" cackles Grandmother as the urskull's eyes begin to glow crimson.

Magic is exhausting, but you are one step closer to saving Heartwood.

"Do you like him?" Grandmother asks after she has absorbed all the spirits inside the urskull.

"What?" You are flabbergasted. She usually only talks about demons and vortices.

"Don't be so surprised," the voice inside the skull speaks. "You think I wasn't a girl once? He is only a male, but quite beautiful in his own way. But you must understand he is a priest. The Cult of the Fifth Eye is no harmless religion, it is a dangerous cabal working against everything we stand for!"

In your heart you know she is right. You are not interested in the religion, just the priest. But if he is an enemy, how can you keep seeing him?

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, Grandmother."

You scrape the desecrated essence back into the jar.

Replace Item card 125 "Urskull ★☆☆" with Item card 126 "Urskull ★★☆".

07 A Nice Feeling of the Fifth Eye

You close your eyes. It feels nice. Peaceful and secure. But do you feel a third eye, let alone a fifth one? Nope.

You open your eyes again.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" Rikko asks.

You nod and smile. It was... nice.

Gain .

08 Nothing Sinister About It

Many think the Jade Tendril are simply foolish pilgrims, but they know much more about demons than most people realize. Something about them draws you to them and you ask to attend one of their rituals, together with Grandmother.

A nihteegri member of the religion has had a baby and they are having a naming ceremony. Blood crystal lights the Northgate District cellar and the babe is baptized with the blood of a sacrificed togrel. It is beautiful and the urskull simply beams with happiness.

If you have "Knowledge of the Urskull" in your Hero Journal, gain 2 Inspiration gems.
Otherwise, gain an Inspiration gem.

09 Conversation with Grandmother

"Look into my eyes, daughter," speaks Grandmother.

The darkness in the empty eye sockets grows and engulfs you whole. It is chilling, like a nightmare. You see the Heartwood burning, Snag Plaza on fire, and the First Tree aflame. Soon, all of the city and all of the land are in cinders, reduced to a wasteland like Crowland up north.

You see quothians fleeing in panic, their feathers burning, chaotically running or riding bactyls, trying to escape their own homeland.

Then you see darkness and nothing more.

"You have seen a possible future, daughter," says the urskull in your mind. "One that you must stop."

"Yes, Grandmother. I have already done more than anyone."

"The Heartwood and the World Egg will be destroyed, lest you do more. You must take the urskull to the vortex on the other side of the world and cast it in. The urskull will be destroyed, but the Heartwood saved. That is the only way to protect the World Egg."

A crimson light grows in the urskull's eyes and turns into a beautiful gem.

Gain
Gain an Inspiration gem **.**

10 The Future.

"Look into my eyes," speaks Grandmother in your mind.

"Yes, Grandmother."

You lift the urskull to eye level and stare at it. It stares at you. You see the future.

Look at the top card of either the World Event deck or the City Event deck. You may place it back on top of the deck or shuffle it into the deck.

11 "Be silent, male!"

You may only be visiting Benem, but you will not be talked to by a male quothian. Who does he think he is? You tell him a male has no business wearing clothes or speaking to a woman, let alone being a priest of any religion.

He is not annoyed or offended, nor does he have the good sense to obey. Instead, he smiles with a slightly pitying look as he replies, "Yes, many quothians think like that when they first leave Heartwood. Would it surprise you to learn that the Runedale High Priestess of the Fifth Eye is a quothian woman? High Priestess Silma personally recruited me and taught me."

It does surprise you. And Rikko keeps surprising you, too. Perhaps there is more to him than meets the eye. Or even the Fifth Eye.

Reluctantly, you agree to meet him later so he can take you to the temple.

Gain 1 to use in this City step.

12 A Secret Liaison

You do not tell Grandmother, but you go and visit Rikko, spending the whole day with him. You walk in the park, eat in a restaurant, and talk for hours.

He asks if he can show you the power of the Fifth Eye, but you hesitate a little. Rikko takes your left hand and places it on your forehead.

"Can you feel it? Can you feel your own fifth eye?"

You cannot.

"Concentrate. Let the ancients guide you."

If you have "Knowledge About the Fifth Eye" in your Hero Journal » 20
Otherwise » 07

13 The Power Of Love

You and Rikko climb to the top of the Tower of Justice in Northgate and perch there together, looking at the two moons rising over Runedale. At his request, you have left Grandmother at home.

"The more you tell me of the ancients," you coo, "the more it sounds to me like you are talking about love. Love as an all-powerful force."

"Yes," Rikko says. You can feel the heat and the passion pulsating from his warm body, barely kept at bay by his willpower. "But a spiritual love, not physical."

"So our bodies," you say caressing the ivory feathers on his chest, "are they not created by the Fifth Eye?"

He reaches into his robes and pulls out a necklace which he then puts around your neck. While doing so, he cannot keep his hand away from your ebony plumage. "They do speak of a holy union between light and dark."

You get up and sit on his lap, the white and black feathers of your bodies rubbing together erotically. "This is the holy union right here."

"Yes..."

Gain an Inspiration gem .

14 Better Poor Than Brainwashed

You hand Rikko two stars and ask him to send the small jar to you via a courier.

"But it is a very small jar," he says. "Why not just put it in your bag?"

You come up with a clumsy excuse, but he immediately sees through it.

"Alright," he smiles, "you don't need to tell me. I will send it to you."

15 Yes, Grandmother

"Kill him," Grandmother shrieks in your mind.

"Yes, Grandmother."

You walk toward Rikko. He looks at you with his beautiful pink eyes, his innocent face unsuspecting.

"Come toward the light. You can still be saved," he says. How you love him.

You quickly pull out your dagger and with one deft strike you cut open his throat. Red blood flows all over his ivory feathers and his amber robes.

"I... love..." Then he falls to the ground, dead.

With tears in your eyes, you turn from him.

"Good, my child," says Grandmother. "Now we can finish our mission."

"Yes, Grandmother."

Gain an Inspiration gem.
Your party may gain +1 Reputation with the Jade Tendril.
Write "Venia Aoxbound" in your Hero Journal.

16 Unholy Ritual

You walk out of Runedale and find a nice tree. You climb to the top of it and look at the two moons, which always remind you of home. You take out the urskull and hold it in one hand, its eyes glowing crimson.

Words of magic come out of your beak in a language you do not know.

You have a burning sensation in your other hand and when you look at it, you see a Blood Crystal. Where did that come from?

Climbing down again is hard with a burned hand.

Gain .
Suffer 2 damage.

17 Burning Hands

You try to channel the spirits of the dead, but they feel an awful lot like aox, and you feel your nerve endings burning!

Eventually you get the hang of the cascading energies and can direct them to the urskull.

Suffer 3 damage and gain an Injury card.
» 06

18 Theft of the Fifth Eye

You let Rikko take you to the Temple of the Fifth Eye to listen to the hymns. You spend some time there, waiting for a chance to help yourself to one of their scrolls. You are sure the Fifth Eye, whatever it is, would understand.

7 +2

SUCCESS » Gain a scroll from the Temple of the Fifth Eye's Magical Scrolls service for free.

FAIL » Lose 2 .

19 An Awkward Friendship

You help Rikko carry his scrolls to Riabo's Reliquary and chat with him on the way. He has outdated ideas of what it is like in Heartwood and you tell him news of home. In return, he explains to you how quothians live in Benem.

There seems to be something about him, something special.

You agree to meet Rikko at the temple later.

He promises to pray for you.

Gain .

20 A Blessing of the Fifth Eye

You close your eyes. You feel the extra eye now, it is as if you are seeing all the magical powers of Agemonia flowing through the air around you: aiun, aox, and others. It is exhilarating and exhausting!

You open your regular eyes and gasp for breath.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" Rikko asks.

Gain an Inspiration gem .

21 Priest vs Grandmother

"Kill him," Grandmother shrieks in your mind.

"Come toward the light. You can still be saved," Rikko says.

You love and respect them both! How can they expect you to choose between them?

As you hesitate, Rikko reveals a golden censer from which emerald smoke spreads. He speaks some holy words you do not understand and you feel the power of your ceremony waning.

The urskull floats toward him and the red light in its eyes turns into piercing rays, like spears of blood. But the violent light struggles to penetrate the emerald smoke.

You are observing a magical battle which you do not fully understand.

Then a cold wind picks up, howling eerily. It blows away the green smoke and the red rays hit Rikko's body. He shrieks in pain and drops the censer in order to protect himself with his hands. The ray burns through his hands, leaving bleeding holes. Occasionally the rays hit his amulet, which starts to grow red-hot and adds to the burning. The smell of burning feathers and flesh is unpleasant, but also strangely appetizing.

You know you should help Rikko, but it is too late. You can only watch as his red blood colors his amber robes and his white feathers.

Still clutching on to life, he turns to flee, but his movements are slowed down as if his feet were stuck in tar. Meanwhile the urskull's burning rays get brighter, hotter, more painful. Finally, they scorch a hole in your beloved, burning through him as he collapses on the ground in a mess of feathers, blood, and cinders.

Grandmother has killed your beloved and you did nothing. There is no time to grieve or even process his death as she warns you someone might come looking for him. You wrap the skull in silk, erase the magic circle, and run away from the crossroads.

As you run, you hear a faint, tired voice inside your head. "Remember, we still have our mission."

"Yes, Grandmother."

Write "Venia Unbound" in your Hero Journal.

5

22 Let Aiun Burn You

You take the jar of aiun cream, even though it hurts. You try to hide your pain from Rikko. He is so innocent.

If you do not have "Knowledge About the Fifth Eye" in your Hero Journal, gain an Injury card.
Gain an Achievement gem .

23 It's a date!

You agree to meet Rikko here later so he can show you around temple. This is easier than you thought!

But when you return to your lodgings and to Grandmother, for some reason you do not want to tell her about the meeting.

Gain an Achievement gem .

24 I Will Touch You

"I have been in your temple," you tell Rikko. "Now I want you to meet my Grandmother."

He follows you home, but before you enter the house, he stops. "There is a dark presence here."

"I'll protect you," you say to him. He may be a priest, but he is still only a man. He needs a woman to tell him what to do. You take him by the hand and pull him inside.

Once inside you caress his head and his body. He is passive, uncertain. "I should not be doing this."

"You're probably right," you say and lean in to peck him. Just before your beaks touch, you withdraw. "Come on."

He moans weakly and follows.

"Grandmother, this is Rikko," you say to the urskull.

Rikko is horrified at the skull. "Where did you get that abomination? It should be buried so its soul can enter the afterlife!"

"Nonsense," you say. "This is Grandmother."

In your head, you hear Grandmother screaming that you are a foolish girl for having brought an enemy priest, an outsider, and a man into your home.

Rikko is terrified. "That is not your Grandmother! That is an evil spirit!"

"That is not your boyfriend, that is an enemy priest!"

They both scream in terror. You are the only one in control.

You hush Rikko, then you cover Grandmother with a black silk cloth, also dampening her sound. You hug Rikko and tell him, "No need to worry. I will take care of you."

Rikko hugs you back, first for comfort, then in lust. "You can do anything you want with me."

You hold him gently by the throat. "Oh, I will." With your other hand, you rip open his yellow robes. "I will."

Gain an Achievement gem .
If you have "Knowledge About the Urskull" in your Hero Journal, gain 1 to use in this City step.